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homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Monday, July 21, 1941

SUBJECT: "CHICKEN FRIED TO A TURN." Information from home economists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Mention favorite foods in any part of the U. S. A., and several people are sure to speak up for fried chicken. Americans just naturally have an appetite for fried chicken. Up North you often hear a lot about "southern fried chicken" or "fried chicken southern-style". South of the Mason-Dixon line, you'll find different States vieing with each other over reputations for fried chicken. You hear about "Maryland fried chicken" and "Virginia fried chicken" and so on.

As a matter of fact, housewives in every State--north, south, east, and west --have been frying chicken, lo, these many years--frying it to what is known as a "turn"--a lovely, brown, crisp, delicate turn. But just a few women--a very few--can't fry chicken to a turn. They haven't learned all the little secrets of frying chicken yet.

Well, July is a good month to learn. July starts the season for fryers in earnest, and the season lasts on through October. You know, fryers are a little older and a little heavier than broilers. You probably get more meat on fryers. As sold, a frying chicken weighs from 2 and a half to 3 and a half pounds. When you get it home, and remove head and feet, and draw it, the fryer will weigh about a fourth less. Better count on allowing three-fourths to one pound of chicken at the market for every person at the dinner table.

The best chicken for frying is young, tender and plump. Look for a chicken with fine-grained, light-colored meat with bits of fat showing here and there underneath the skin.

You can fry chicken either in shallow fat or deep fat. If you fry in a pan in shallow fat, here are a couple of secrets to keep in mind. First, use a thick skillet or chicken-fryer--a thick pan with a cover to fit. Second, have a good half-inch of meated fat in the bottom of the pan so that the fat can come up around each piece of chicken. Third, don't use such a hot fire that the fat smokes and the chicken scorches on the outside before the inside is done. A thin pan, too little fat, or too much heat mean that the chicken gets too done on the outside but is raw inside.

So much for secrets. Now let's start and go from step to step in this process of frying chicken to a turn. Of course, you remove any pin feathers from the chicken first. And then you draw the chicken, and cut it into pieces the right size for serving. Wipe each piece as dry as possible. (Never soak the chicken in water, or wash it in water. You lose flavor and nourishment that way.) Season each piece with salt and pepper and then roll in flour. Or dip each piece in egg beaten with a tablespoon of water. And then coat with very fine dry breadcrumbs or corn meal.

Now get your frying pan over the fire--that good thick pan that won't scorch in the center of the bottom, but will hold heat, and distribute it evenly. Put in the fat and be sure it covers the pan and comes up at least a half inch on the side when it melts. Now when the fat is hot but not smoking, start putting in the pieces of chicken. Put in the large thick pieces first--the breast, and thighs, and drumsticks. Cover the pan partly while the pieces brown so the fat won't spatter. Turn the pieces over when they're lightly browned. And here's an important point .....As soon as the pieces are lightly browned, cut down the heat and finish the cooking slowly--turning the pieces occasionally. Moderate cooking is the secret of keeping the meat juicy while it cooks clear to the bone.

By the way, when you put the chicken in, don't crowd it. Leave enough space so the fat can come up around the sides of each piece. You may have to have 2 pans, if you have a good-sized family. You might have one pan over moderate heat and put the pieces in it that have been browned in the other pan. Have one pan for browning at higher heat, and one pan to finish the cooking at moderate heat.

The larger pieces of chicken will be done in 20 to 25 minutes if you use this method of frying. The smaller pieces will take less time naturally. When the chicken is done so that it is tender all through, and no pink flesh shows around the bone, then remove it from the pan. Don't over cook fried chicken. Too much cooking or too high heat makes it dry, stringy and hard.

One last point. Many cooks prefer to brown fried chicken in a skillet, and then finish the cooking at moderate heat in the oven. Have the oven about 300 degrees Fahrenheit. If you are cooking several birds and haven't enough skillet space, this oven-finishing is the answer. Shift the well-browned pieces to a pan with a rack so the fat can drain through. Cover the pan and let the cooking continue 20 minutes or so until the chicken is done.

Most people like fried chicken served with cream gravy. You make cream gravy with the drippings from the frying pan. To every 2 tablespoons of fat in the pan or skillet, allow 2 tablespoons of flour. Cook for a few minutes. Stir occasionally. Add one and a half cups of milk. And then cook until thickened. Season to taste and serve hot.

And that's how good cooks in every State fry chicken to a turn and have delicious cream gravy to serve with it.

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